

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Harvard Corporation

Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Harvard Corporation: Exports & Lean Lead to Growth

Client Profile:

Harvard Corporation, founded in 1973, is a privately-owned manufacturer of filters and filtration systems based in Evansville, Wisconsin. The company's proprietary state-of-the-art filters are designed to clean fluids, such as the lubricants used in the transportation, power generation, and mining and construction industries. Harvard Corporation currently employs 16 people.

Situation:

When Otto Knottnerus purchased the company in 2007, his first order of business was to review the Harvard production process to make it more efficient and improve product quality. Knottnerus made a series of improvements throughout the plant that enhanced work flow, and reduced waste, energy and raw material usage. "The changes we made were good, but I knew that much more could be done to increase efficiency, so I contacted the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Program (WMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for fresh perspective on the operation," said Knottnerus.

Solution:

WMEP demonstrated to the company how Value Stream Mapping (VSM) could eliminate wasted steps and increase efficiency. VSM includes video-taping each step of the production process so that the entire team can review what is happening and suggest improvements. "This process greatly reduced wasted effort and also highlighted areas where we really needed new equipment for safety or efficiency reasons," said Knottnerus. Highly regarded as a leader in quality and innovation, Harvard was ready to take the company to the next level with an aggressive marketing campaign to target new customers and markets. The firm again reached out to WMEP for assistance. WMEP worked with Harvard to develop and implement a marketing plan that includes a range of sales programs, a website upgrade, new advertising, and outreach to international markets. "We've just started selling through distributors in Africa," said Knottnerus. "This product is ideal for their needs. Often, newly purchased lubricants are already contaminated during the shipping process, and our filter system will clean the new oil and keep it clean. This extends the life of the equipment and the lubricant. In addition, the filters do not need to be drained or handled as toxic waste. Because of the design changes I made to the filter, it is now completely recyclable. The filter is made from paper with 80 percent recycled content, and any waste produced during manufacture is returned to the suppliers so it can be recycled again. This opens up new markets to large customers with sustainability requirements as well as some countries with strict sustainability regulation." WMEP recommended the ExporTech program to Harvard. ExporTech is a series of training sessions where non-competing participants develop an export strategy with help from experts from the Department of Commerce and local export professionals with a variety of backgrounds. "The ability to get credit checks of potential customers and overseas distributors has been particularly valuable," said Knottnerus, who is planning to go to Brazil to meet with potential distributors. "It looks like Brazil has tremendous market potential for Harvard, and this trip will help me assess the both the potential and the challenges involved in selling

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in that market." With WMEP's assistance, the company is poised for growth due to industry trends to reduce costs and enhance sustainability. "Our products have the ability to save companies a lot of money while using resources more efficiently," Knottnerus said.

Results:

- * Increased sales by 5 percent.
- * Reduced product build time by 15 to 20 percent.
- * Created new markets.

Testimonial:

"WMEP has been an invaluable resource in helping the company implement Lean and tap new customers and markets. WMEP brings us a fresh perspective and creative concepts and ideas that represent the best practices in industry today."

Otto Knottnerus, President, General Manager